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ABSTRACT

Canada's residential school system for Aboriginal children has had lasting damaging effects on Indigenous people. Founded in 1879, the residential school system was operated through a church-state partnership. The government provided the funding, set standards of care, and supervised the administration of schools, while the Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, and United Churches staffed and managed the schools. Despite maintaining the public rhetoric that the schools provided "a mother's care" and a good education, the government and the churches were aware of the widespread neglect and abuse occurring in the schools. This book attempts to answer the question of how such a perversion of responsibility and Christianity happened. Part 1 examines Canada's mid-19th-century assimilative ideology of civilization and the rationale for residential schools--the felt need to separate "savage" parent from child, which justified the concerted attack upon Aboriginal cultures and languages. Part 2 addresses the period from 1879 to 1946. The most persistent flaw in the system, chronic underfunding, resulted in overcrowding, lax administration, budget shortfalls, and poor hygiene and diet that led to many deaths from tuberculosis, neglect, abuse, and a failure of the schools to reach their educational goals. Part 3 charts the years from 1946, when the government decided to abandon residential schools in favor of integrated day-school education, to 1986, when the last schools were closed. Various reform schemes implemented during this time were ineffective, and abuse continued until the final closings. The epilogue recounts the revelations of persistent sexual abuse that surfaced soon after 1986, and the media reports and litigation that moved the government from effacement to apology. An appendix lists the residential schools in 1931. (Contains 140 references, notes, an index, and photographs.) (TD)